



PRESS RELEASE

The Football Supporters' Federation

For Immediate Release – 26.11.08

Football Supporters' Federation response to new Home Office figures: Don't treat fans like criminals [Immediate Release 26.11.08]

Figures released by the Home Office this week (see Notes to Editors) prove what the Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) have been arguing for years – there is absolutely no need to treat football fans as criminals.

The latest Home Office statistics show that 37 million supporters attended football matches in England and Wales last year and there were only 3,842 arrests made – one in every 10,000 fans.

Only one in 10 of these arrests were actually made for acts of violence - the majority related to consumption of alcohol, pitch incursions and public disorder offences.

Of these offences the majority were committed away from football stadiums, meaning that less than half a fan per game, per stadium was arrested inside a football ground.

And the FSF are extremely concerned with the manner in which police increasingly choose to use legislation in order to criminalise normal football supporters.

Amanda Jacks, of the FSF, said:

“The vast majority of football supporters are normal, law abiding citizens and we're very concerned at this portrayal of fans as violent, mindless thugs. The Government's own statistics show this is simply not the case, and we're pleased that Home Office minister Vernon Coaker has acknowledged this.

“There were fewer than 1,600 arrests inside football stadiums last year, a tiny amount when you consider a total of 37 million people attended games. And a large number of these were for trivial offences such as persistent standing or drinking alcohol within sight of the pitch.

“It’s very difficult for many supporters to challenge fairly minor, non-violent charges. We’ve heard from people who have been put off from contesting dubious charges purely because of the expense involved or have had their cases thrown out due to lack of evidence – although these still appear in the arrest figures.

“Supporters are frequently treated like criminals, and we hear of far too many worrying cases.”

Recent examples of this include 80 Stoke fans rounded up in a Greater Manchester pub before their club’s visit to Old Trafford. The supporters were served a Section 27 order, which means police can forcibly move people from an area, whether an offence has taken place or not. There had been no reports of trouble and no complaint from the pub’s landlord. The fans were taken back to Stoke against their will and missed their team’s game against Manchester United.

In another shocking case last month, Chelsea fan Cliff Auger was victimised for protecting his teenage son. He was found guilty of ‘causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal’ and fined £500 following the Chelsea v QPR FA Cup tie in January 2008. After the match one of his son’s friends went into a pub to use the toilet, shortly afterwards the premises were ‘locked down’ by the police meaning no one could enter or leave. Whilst asking police if his son’s friend might be permitted to leave the pub, Cliff’s eldest son James was bitten on the leg by a police dog. In an attempt to release his son from the dog’s grip, Cliff kicked the dog and was immediately wrestled to the floor by police officers. He was left with four broken ribs, a punctured lung, conviction, and a £500 fine. The vet at Cliff’s trial testified that the dog received nothing more than a few minutes discomfort.

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Notes to editors:

These statistics are taken from a Home Office report released yesterday and available to download:

<http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/football-violence>

The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) is the national supporters' organisation for all football fans from England and Wales comprising over 142,000 individual fans and members of local supporters' organisations from every club in the professional structure and many from the pyramid. For more info <http://www.fsf.org.uk/about-the-fsf.php>

Read more on Stoke fans and Section 27:

<http://www.fsf.org.uk/news/Policing-of-Stoke-fans-raises-serious-concerns.php>

Read more on Cliff Auger:

http://www.fsf.org.uk/news/FSF_disgust_at_fan_court_verdict.php?id=added|desc|20

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